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ABSTRACT

Helping urban principals and schools work effectively requires analyzing the urban school context. Ways in which schools can serve the poor are detailed in this study. The research employed three separate approaches: use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies to identify the primary concerns of residents from three economically depressed urban communities located in a city in the Midwest; exploration of residents' perceptions of efforts by eight middle school principals and school staff to address these concerns; and analysis of the perceptions of middle school personnel to determine how impoverished communities and the needs of poor residents and students were conceptualized and addressed by middle school staff, by school programs, and by activities, respectively. Findings reveal that although most persons rate the nation's public schools as average or below average overall, they rate schools in their communities much higher than they rate the nation's schools. Consistent concerns about family safety, finances, personal property, hope, the belief that others care, perceptions of the principal, and perceptions of middle school staff are described. It is hoped that educators can gain insights about what urban residents value in educational practice and reform and thus adjust teacher and administrator preparation programs accordingly. (Contains 12 references.) (RJM)

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How Public Middle Schools Serve Poor Students:

An Analysis of Community Need and Perceptions of Principal and Middle School Effectiveness

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by

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Abstract.

This investigation had three purposes. First, using qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the researcher attempted to identify the primary concerns of residents from three separate and economically depressed urban communities located in a city in the Midwest. Second, the researcher attempted to understand residents' perceptions regarding the efforts of eight middle level principals and school staff toward addressing these concerns. Third, the investigator analyzed the perceptions of middle school personnel and existing school programs to determine how impoverished communities and the needs of poor residents and students were conceptualized and addressed respectively by middle school staff and school programs and activities.

Helping urban principals and schools work effectively requires analyzing the urban school context. As an understanding of this context increases, so too will knowledge about behaviors that are both useful and ineffective for addressing urban

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needs. Upon acquiring this knowledge, scholars, practitioners, and policy makers can gain insights about what urban residents value in educational practice and reform. This knowledge will also increase understandings about the readiness of administrator and teacher preparation programs for confronting these challenges.

Research on Community Needs and Expectations

Research on community needs and expectations often describe empirical studies of school-community relations. These studies typically examine how schools serve poor students by creating stable, predictable analytic laboratories out of dynamic urban school environments (Sergiovanni, 1991). Making urban schools into controlled research laboratories is preferred for regulating variables, testing theory, and for producing instrumental findings that are significant for training and for sustaining educational research. Establishing a controlled school environment is also useful for generating empirical "school results" over which researchers and practitioners may presumably exercise further influence and control.

Although well intentioned, researchers using empirical methods have discounted the ontology that frames school-community relations as a social construction. This oversight leaves empirical investigative techniques vulnerable to charges of relativism and to criticisms about the transferability and applicability of laboratory findings to schools and communities. Additionally, fastidious attempts to control for confounding variables leads to criticisms about inclusiveness and how uncertain school and community environments are defined. In short, by striving to limit and control for

variables, empirical researchers have also limited concepts like "human resources" while framing urban communities in this case, as potentially oppositional, pathological, and deleterious to understanding school operations and productivity.

Proponents of "alternative" qualitative approaches on the other hand, attempt to achieve inclusion by "generating theory" and by analyzing how social interactions in dynamic school settings influence "how meaning is made" in those settings. Unlike investigators using empirical methodologies, qualitative researchers view school and community environments as social constructions. These researchers discount the possibility of objective universally applicable social research, preferring instead to create substantive theory and to position themselves clearly in their studies. These researchers position themselves in their inquiry by declaring specific political dispositions and sociological paradigms for data collection and interpretation at the onset. Thus, the qualitative investigator's stance and research interests are clear as they work to answer not only "what is," but "what should be" occurring in schools and school-community relations.

By framing reality as a social construction, qualitative investigators also limit the generalizability of their school-community research to a particular setting, time and sequence of events (Gage, 1996). Framing reality as a social construction, in short, neither satisfies charges of relativism nor silences criticisms of applicability as findings may quickly grow obsolete as time passes and reality is reinvented. Charges of imposition may also be levied as qualitative investigators insinuate themselves, their

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perceptions and their beliefs on issues of school-community relations and what is "right" for schools. Finally, the casual application of qualitative techniques may lead to an image of reality that is ahistorical and consequently superficial. By omitting an analysis of how schools have responded to poor students in the past and longitudinally in other words, the qualitative researcher may generate findings that ignore, misinterpret, and treat the series of events that explain behavior blindly. This political, ahistoric, and potentially inadequate approach may further lead to erroneous conclusions and recommendations grounded in myths about what is "wrong" and "right" with students, schools, and communities while ignoring what may be wrong and right with investigators and research techniques.

In short, educational researchers applying quantitative and qualitative approaches necessarily view internal and external factors shaping schools using educational lens. These lenses enable the "educrat" to assert her or himself by establishing particular knowledge about school-community interactions and reform, and by claiming ownership over the functions of the school. This educational perspective may also yield to an authoritarianism and rationality that are useful for hustling some logic into research on schooling, and for keeping others including specific community members out.

Finally, making the study of schools the "technology of educators" also limits understanding contexts associated with school-community relations, urban complexity, and organizational diversity. This is important as educators may mistake their particular

preferences for the needs of the many. Additionally, this exclusionary approach may cultivate enhanced representations of educators' middle class artifacts and lifestyles, and depressed and antagonistic images of the social, political, economic, and educational opportunities for urban communities and poor urban residents.

Sociological Imperatives

As stated, freeing the urban poor from exclusionary and oppressive research methods and ideologies requires that reformers, in part, hold a factual knowledge of the systems and people who make up the urban community (Bagin, et. al., 1994). The more that is known about urban systems and urban residents, the greater the likelihood that opportunities for inclusion, access, efficacy, and class mobility for urban residents and communities may be designed.

Researchers supporting this view recommend that principals and individual school districts start by taking a sociological inventory of their communities" (Bagin, et. al., 1994, p. 17) to help residents achieve specific objectives. These researchers also caution that principals and school districts apply limits when compiling inventories to control planning and to limit the scope of data collected for future analysis and application purposes. These reservations about time, money, and labor are similarly important for controlling and maximizing resources, and for constructing a potential research laboratory. Unfortunately, these limits also politicize the process of school-community interaction as researchers, policy makers, and educational practitioners become trapped in dialogue and dichotomy considering what middle class ideologies,

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peoples, and communities to involve and who to leave out. Further, the potential to gain comprehensive knowledge to cultivate efficacy in the urban community becomes secondary as educators think less about the characteristics and assets of the poor, and more about the peoples and efficiency of systems that mirror and support their own collective beliefs.

Accordingly, analyses and training for administrator and teacher effectiveness must include strategies for learning about the community and its past, while building full urban inclusion for effective urban school reform. These strategies must combine the perspectives of residents, educators, historians, and persons outside of education like urban planners for desired long lasting urban renewal. Additionally, discussions about creating access and human efficacy must be substantively related to urban persons and to the rules of the urban school community. This approach neither disputes the import of the middle class for the preservation of democracy, nor does it frame educators as gatekeepers of middle class values. Instead, this concept recognizes the potential for education to affect and affirm the individual's quality of life. This concept also indicates a paradigm shift to community and research based definitions of principal and school-community effectiveness, and to the need for skills in constructing authentic formal and informal school-community dialogue, collaboration and partnerships inclusive of humaneness and multiple perspectives. In sum, pursuers of knowledge about effective administrator and teacher practice and improved school-community relations must conceive of training and education on different and broader terms,

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focusing reform efforts on economic development, housing, the health requirements of individuals and families in urban communities, and the roles of schools in confronting these challenges. Community revitalization and involvement are necessary for individual fulfillment and for building schools that serve urban youth. Enabling students to do build character and do well for themselves and in society requires identifying and establishing relevant community support systems that do not yield systems reliance and discontinuity, but opportunities for personal efficacy. Consequently, this manuscript introduces, combines, and applies these broadened concepts to learn about community needs, and to assess principal and school staff effectiveness in addressing these needs.

Design and Methodology

To understand the needs of the three communities and to explore the degree of principal and school staff effectiveness in identifying and meeting these needs, various quantitative and qualitative methods guided data collection. Surveys and historical organizational case study procedures(Bogdan et al., 1992) were developed and used to identify state, city, and community historical trends and characteristics, and to trace how school-community collaborative efforts evolved and functioned. These methods involved surveying specific community residents, analyzing census data and minutes filed by community based organization members, neighborhood block parent clubs, and community watch programs. Relevant urban school documents owned by urban guardians and residents with children enrolled in the eight participating middle schools

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that served as feeder schools for the three communities were also analyzed. Local police statistical records, census data provided by local government officials, and annual school reports were also studied to generate and test theory, and to confirm and disconfirm findings on the concerns of residents and the efforts of school personnel to address these concerns.

Coupled with these analyses, specific community organizers, students, parents, educators and persons from business and industry were interviewed to understand past and present relations between the middle schools and their surrounding contexts. Finally, multicase/multisite comparative research methods were used to help: (1) identify community needs; (2) understand values and expectations held by residents for the eight principals and middle schools; (3) evaluate perceptions and efforts made by principals and middle school personnel surrounding school-community relations and collaborative efforts. Collaborative efforts were defined as programs and activities that involved school personnel, and emphasized the inclusion of poor students, their families, and other residents from the three communities included in this study. School-community collaborative programs and activities also described parent-teacher associations and neighborhood cleanup and revitalization efforts that included residents and school personnel.

A research assistant and I gathered these data over a 22 month period. Together, 244 interviews were conducted, and 44 surveys were delivered to and completed with residents with children enrolled in one of the eight middle schools. The

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survey instrument was developed and piloted with interviewees prior to its completion by 44 residents.

Nearly 2000 documents were also collected while approximately 680 hours of observation and interview data were complied. These surveys, observations and interviews involved 284 persons, including 68 neighborhood leaders and 44 residents representing the three participating urban communities; 60 students and 67 of their guardians including a minimum of six students from each of the eight participating middle schools in the three separate school districts.

Eight principals and 41 teachers and staff participating in school-community collaborative organizations and activities were also identified, interviewed and observed to understand how these school personnel perceived poor students and school efforts designed to meet the needs of these students and their communities. For the purpose(s) of identification and inclusion in the research, community was operationally defined to include only those impoverished urban neighborhoods and those residents who also had children enrolled in any one of eight middle schools in the three separate urban school districts included in this study. Table 1 lists the participants and communities involved in this study.

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Table 1. Research Participants Including Communities, Districts, Respondents and Totals.

Comm./ District and Number(s) of Respnses	All Participants (N = 288)							
	Community Participants (N = 239)				School Participants (N = 49)			
	Local Leaders	Local Residents	Guardians	Students	Principals	Assistant Principals	Teachers	Staff
X (N = 91)	18	15	22	20	2	1	9	4
Y (N =105)	20	17	20	30	5	3	7	3
Z (N =102)	30	12	25	10	1	0	13	1
Total(s)	68	44	67	60	8	4	29	8

Data Analysis

The constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1987; Strauss, 1987) and descriptive statistics (Borg and Gail, 1994) were used to analyze and rank data. Interviews with superintendents and principals were scheduled first to gain entry into each of the eight middle schools, then to gain permission to study school records on student demographics, impoverished feeder neighborhoods, and community based organizations and initiatives. A survey instrument was later developed and completed by urban parents and guardians. Analysis and data collection occurred simultaneously, and the emerging themes determined which neighborhoods to study, who to interview and observe, and what questions to include on the survey.

Coding the data involved analyzing neighborhood settlement and transience patterns, understanding why some urban residents stayed in particular neighborhoods for three years or longer, and why others left according to those persons who remained.

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Coding also involved analyzing the discourse of neighborhood leaders and other residents to identify community concerns, and residents' perceptions about principals and the middle school practitioners' effectiveness in addressing community concerns. Finally, minutes and documents generated by parent-teachers' groups and other school-based community support programs and activities were coded to determine how these structures responded to poor students, families, and impoverished community characteristics.

Data were similarly coded while analyzing the perceptions of residents, students, and practitioners to understand the relationships between participants, groups of individuals, and what was said. A set of community concerns and perceptions about principal and middle school effectiveness emerged for the eight principals and their participating middle schools. Similarly, characteristics of existing school-community collaborative efforts emerged. Finally, these three sets of characteristics were analyzed individually and constantly compared to generate findings and conclusions that were grounded historically, substantively, and that were potentially generalizable.

Findings

Community Concerns

Two hundred and thirty seven of 239 interviewees and survey respondents (99%) rated "family safety" or "staying alive" as the primary concern of residents living in the three participating urban communities. Two hundred and twenty-six (95%) rated personal finances or "having enough money to get by" as their second greatest

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concern, and 184 (77%) related that keeping and protecting personal property or "possessions" was their "third most important worry" (see Table 2). One hundred and sixty two participants from 179 families involved (90%) indicated they were on some form of public assistant for a minimum of three years or "for as long as they remember," and 147 of the 239 participants (62%) believed there was "hope for a better future." Thirty four of the 239 participants interviewed (14%) believed that others "cared" or "listened" to their "worries."

Table 2. Community Resident Concerns and Perceptions

Community and Data Source	Numbers of Responses	Numbers Receiving Public Assistance	Community Concerns and Perceptions				
			Family and Personal Safety	Personal Finances	Personal Property	Hope for a Better Future	Belief that Others Care/Listen
X	75	48	75	73	64	42	8
Y	77	53	76	72	58	48	9
Z	87	61	86	81	62	57	17
Total(s) and Percents	239 100%	162 90%	237 99%	226 95%	184 77%	147 62%	34 14%

Family/Personal Safety:

Leaders, residents, and students from the three participating urban communities were concerned most about family and personal safety, and violence being inflicted upon them by "other residents" and "teenage youths." While being interviewed and later surveyed in their homes, these persons indicated that residents were most often victims of "teenage assault" and that "burglary," "automobile theft," and "drugs" were "daily worries for everyone in the different neighborhoods." An analysis of crime

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statistics for communities X, Y, and Z for 1994 indicated that greater than 50 percent of "all" crime in the three areas studied involved middle school juveniles ranging in ages from 13 to 17 years. Table 3 provides community demographic information including community populations, percentage(s) of total population(s) at or below poverty (rounded to whole integers), numbers of impoverished neighborhoods visited, the numbers of middle school students enrolled, and the numbers of middle school students receiving free or reduced breakfast and/or lunch. Table 3 indicates that the percentages of residents at or below poverty for 1994 ranged from 9% to 29% of the total population, and the numbers of middle school students in breakfast and lunch programs were at or below those percentages. Table 4 lists top five juvenile offences and the totals of all crimes for communities X, Y, and Z for 1994. Table 4 also indicates that more than 50% of all crime in communities X, Y, and Z involved middle school youths, and that approximately 75% of their offences included property crimes like automobile theft, burglary, robbery, and theft.

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Table 3. 1994 Community and Middle School Student Demographic Information.

Community			
Total Population	11,216	30,772	11, 314
Percentage of Total Population at or Below Poverty Level	9%	19%	29%
Total Number(s) of Middle Schools	2	5	1
Total Number(s) of Impoverished Feeder Neighborhoods Visited	7	16	4
Total Number(s) of Middle School Students Enrolled	663	2,474	834
Number(s) of Middle School Students in School Lunch Program	83	291	114
Number(s) of Middle School Students in School Breakfast Program	11	47	18

Table 4. 1994 Leading Juvenile Crime Statistics and Offences for Communities X, Y, and Z

Comm									
Offence	Juvenile	Total	Juvenile Percent	Juvenile	Total	Juvenile Percent	Juvenile	Total	Juvenile Percent
Aggravat Assault	136	364	37%	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	151	453	33%
Assault	52	493	11%	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	116	835	14%
Auto Theft	654	723	90%	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	932	1,076	87%
Burglary	307	371	83%	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	465	584	80%
Drug Violation	23	176	13%	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	39	246	16%
Robbery	42	128	33%	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	43	187	23%
Theft	1,226	1,874	69%	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	1,944	2,820	69%
Totals	2,442	4,129	59%	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	3,690	6,201	58%

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Personal Finances:

One hundred sixty-two of the 179 community residents and families (90%) involved in this study were at or below the poverty threshold level earning less than $11,000 (US Census, 1990). These persons indicated that "almost everyone [in the neighborhood] was poor," and that most residents "were on the system" (public assistance). Interviews and surveys completed by these 179 adult residents indicated that 86 persons (49%) earned additional dollars working part time to "make ends meet," and that all adults and guardians interviewed had "no health plan" or "health insurance." Fifty eight (67%) of those 86 residents earning supplementary incomes reported that child care was necessary "while at work," and that older "brothers" and "sisters" cared for younger siblings "to help out" and "to save money." Seventy nine of these 86 adult respondents (92%) also reported that middle school students "occasionally" and "sometimes" "missed school" and "didn't do homework" because of child care responsibilities.

An analysis of data provided by the three participating school districts indicated that 10 of 104 of those students listed as residing in communities X, Y, and Z applied and were participating in school breakfast programs (10%) at the beginning of the school calendar, and that 48 students (46%) were in "free" or "reduced" lunch programs. These data also showed that as the numbers of middle school students increased, the percentage of students receiving breakfast and lunch decreased. Interviews with students, guardians, and middle school staff indicated that students "did

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not know," "did not want to," and were "embarrassed" to participate in school breakfast, and that middle school personnel "did not emphasize" the availability of breakfast programs due to "transportation" and "staffing problems." Figures detailing the total numbers of middle school students eligible to apply for free or reduced school breakfast and/or lunch from communities X, Y, and Z were neither collected by the schools nor available at the completion of this research.

Personal Property:

One hundred and seventeen of 239 residents (49%) indicated that their homes had been "broken into," while 103 (43%) feared having personal property "stolen" or damaged. Sixty seven residents (28%) believed that property crimes involved "teens," or middle level aged youths "most of the time", and that crime involving personal property occurred most "during the day" and "on Friday's or the weekend." Sixty-seven of 117 of those residents whose homes were vandalized (57%) reported "knowing," and "meeting" persons entering their homes illegally. Finally, 93 of 117 victims (79%) indicated they "did not tell" and "did not report" property crimes to police and others because they did not "trust," did not "want the hassle," and did not believe "any good would come from it."

An analysis of "school data" taken from the eight participating middle schools when coupled with interviews with police indicated that 42 of the 87 middle school students residing in communities X,Y, and Z (48%) had "contact" with police officials. Of these 42 students, 36 middle school pupils (86%) had entered the legal system and

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were classified "AD" or adjudicated delinquent. Interviews with students, guardians, local school and legal personnel generated varied reasons explaining why teenage youth were involved in property crime most often. Thirty-four of 60 students (56%) who were either "involved in" or "knew someone involved in" property crime indicated that they "didn't know why" these crimes were committed. Twenty-six students (43%) indicated that property crimes occurred more often because "you got things," were "safer," "less serious," and "easier to get away with [than other crime]." One hundred fifty three of 179 adult participants (85%) cited "poverty," "boredom," "peers," "drugs," and "gangs" as reasons for youth crime.

Hope:

When asked to assess their quality of life and "hope for the future," 94 of 239 (39%) community respondents indicated that they were "okay" or "somewhat satisfied" with their home lifestyle. Of these, 152 of 179 adult residents (85%) indicated that their "own dreams passed" and "were gone," while all 179 held "more hope" and "faith" for their children's future lives. One hundred seventy two of 179 adults (96%) believed that "school was important" for the future success of children, while 147 of 239 community respondents (62%) overall expressed hope for a better future.

All 60 middle school students believed that their "future life" would be "better than" their parents and guardians current lifestyles. Of this group, 24 indicated (40%) that "jobs" and "careers" would lead to "better living," eight students (13%) stated that "doing good in school was important," and 28 students (47%) said they "did not know

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how" to achieve a better future. Conversely, 44 of 60 students (73%) also indicated they were "disrespected," "unhappy" and "angry" with how they were treated "in and out of school," and that they "[didn't think] things would get better in [their] school." Fifty-four of 60 students interviewed (90%) identified "leaving the neighborhood and friends" as important for future success.

Belief that Others Care or Listen:

When asked if "help was needed and available," 107 of 179 adult respondents (60%) indicated that others "did not understand," "did not listen," and were "turned-off" by their neighborhoods and lifestyles. Also, 171 of 179 adult residents (95%) indicated that they did not recall "ever having someone who cared visit or come [to their homes except for family]." One hundred seventy-two of 179 adult respondents (96%) indicated that home visits were made by "social workers," "case workers," "police," and "attendance people" from the participating school districts, but that these persons "were taking numbers," "doing a job," "made you feel bad," and "did not really care at all."

All 60 middle school students indicated that their "parents and families cared," and that they had "friends" who cared about them. None of these students was certain if case workers and other visitors to their home(s) cared, but 16 of 60 students (27%) indicated that "those people probably cared or else they wouldn't come [to students' homes]." Twenty-two of the 60 students (37%) indicated that parents, guardians, and family members were "upset," "angry," and "sad" on one or more occasions after "case workers and those other people left."

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Community Perceptions About Principal and Middle School Effectiveness

All 239 respondents "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with the statement that the "principal was visible and involved in the community" (see Table 5). Two hundred and thirty three (97%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the middle school had a "caring principal," and 234 participants including residents, guardians, and middle school students (98%) disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement that the "principal was effective overall."

All but one of the residents from the three communities disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement that "middle school staff was visible and involved in the community." Two hundred nineteen residents (92%) disagreed and strongly disagreed that middle school staff was "caring," while 16 (.07%) indicated that teachers and staff "cared." Finally, 207 of 239 community participants (87%) disagreed and strongly disagreed that middle school staff was "effective overall," while 21 (.09%) agreed that teachers and staff were "effective."

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Table 5. Community Perceptions of Principals and Middle Schools (N = 239)

Principal Visible and Involved in Community	0	0	0	18	221
Caring Principal	0	0	6	57	176
Principal Effective Overall	0	0	5	48	186
Middle School Visible and Involved in Community	0	0	1	11	227
Caring Middle School Staff	2	14	4	149	70
Middle School Staff Effective Overall	0	21	11	118	89

Views of The Principal

Principal Visible and Involved in Community

Ninety six of 179 adult respondents (54%) admitted that they "did not know the principal's name at the start of the year," but that they "eventually found out later." One hundred two guardians and parents (57%) recalled that contact with the principal "happened in the [middle] school," and that meetings were "about discipline" or "getting into special programs like special ed." None of the 179 adult residents recalled seeing or talking with principals "at neighborhood meetings," "church," or "outside of school property," and none had middle school principals "come to [their] home." All 179 of

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these adult participants also indicated the principal "did not live in [their] neighborhood."

All 60 of the middle school students interviewed indicated that their "first contact" with the principal occurred during "an assembly," "program," "in the classroom," and "in the hall." Individual contact with the principal "happened the first time" when students "got in trouble" and were "sent by teachers" and staff "to the principal's or assistant principal's office." All students "heard" or "knew" of occasions when "[other students] saw the principal in "stores" and "in their neighborhood," and admitted that "[the principal] never came to my house." Finally, all 60 students said they "did not know where the principal's house was," and that they "never saw" or "heard" about the principal "going to anybody's house in [their] neighborhood."

Caring Principal

Seventy six of 179 adults (42%) indicated that middle level principals "must care about kids," but that principals "cared more about some people's kids than others." These 76 respondents explained that principals "would probably [have other jobs] if they didn't like kids," and that principals "did not know neighborhood people's kids" and "poor kids real well." These interviewees further explained that "the principal wasn't the same people [as residents]," and that (s)he "[could not] understand how [local residents] lived. These respondents also explained that middle level principals "thought bad," "looked down on," and "had pain on their faces" whenever they met in school, and that scheduled conferences "usually went bad with the principal defending teachers" and "giving orders like they knew what was right."

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Fifty-eight of the 60 middle school students interviewed (97%) indicated that principals preferred some students more than others. These students stated that "kids from outside [the neighborhood] were liked better" and "got more respect from the principal." These 58 students also explained that "you never saw the principal yelling or getting in some students faces," and that the principal would "do that with [students] from the [neighborhood]." These 58 students also recalled instances when classmates and peers from their neighborhoods would be "arrested in the parking lot," "slammed and cuffed in the hall," and "turned over to Hansen [police] with no phone calls going home." Fifty-eight of 60 students also perceived that principals viewed them as "worse," "dirty," "ignorant," "trouble," and "another problem [from the neighborhood] just waiting to happen."

Principal Effective Overall

One hundred sixty nine of 179 adult participants (94%) "disagreed" and "strongly disagreed" with the statement that the "principal [was] effective overall," while five adults were "neutral." These participants explained that the "elementary, middle, and high school principals never came to [community] meetings," and that "they probably wouldn't be caught in the "neighborhood]." Of the 169 respondents, all guardians and parents with children enrolled in schools concurred that the eight middle school principals were "not good," "very unfair," and "weak" because they "didn't visit" and "check thing out," and because they "liked families with money and things more than poor families who didn't have nothing to offer." These parents and guardians indicated

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that principals favored wealthier families and students because "those families do good and got things the school wants," and "the rich kids stand for something the teachers like." These guardians and parents further explained that principals "want the families that look good and act good because that makes the school and the principal look good." These 169 respondents also reasoned that failure was "expected" and "normal for poor kids," and that "if poor kids failed in schools it was no loss" because they "did what everyone said they would do."

Fifty-eight of 60 middle school students interviewed "disagreed" and "strongly disagreed" with the statement that the "principal was effective overall" (96%) while two students were "neutral." Supporting assertions that principals demonstrated preferential treatment in schools, these students reiterated that "principals liked rich kids more [than poor students]." When asked how they "knew" the principal "liked some students more than others," these students explained that "some [students] were liked better because they looked like the principal wanted," and "when they did things the principal said they did good" and "they got things." These 58 students also explained that "the same students got all the awards and handshakes and stuff at the awards assemblies," and that "we [students from the neighborhood] got awards for gym," "sports," "drill," and "perfect attendance." These students also stated that the principal "flagged" or had particular students targeted when "looking to blame somebody just to get them out of school." One student recalled being "stopped for a hall pass when other kids were there automatically," while another explained that "you couldn't cut [tease] a principal

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like some kids without thinking you had to be cool... [were] different or didn't fit in or belong or something."

Views of The Middle School

Middle School Staff Visible and Involved in Community

One hundred seventy of 179 adult residents (95%) "disagreed" and "strongly disagreed" with the statement "middle school staff were visible and involved in the community," while four adults were "neutral." These 170 respondents said they "never saw teachers" or school staff at community and neighborhood meetings or functions. All 179 adult respondents also indicated they were "never" visited by their child's teachers. Ninety four of 179 adults (53%) indicated they were visited by "school case workers," and "attendance officers,"while six of 179 guardians (.03%) noted that they "knew" or "heard about teachers visiting students' homes." None of the 179 adult residents indicated "seeing" or "talking" with teachers and staff informally away from school grounds.

All 60 of the middle school students interviewed indicated that teachers and staff did not visit their homes or neighborhoods. None of these students "remembered" or "heard of" teachers or staff visiting "churches" or "other students homes" in their neighborhoods, but 34 students (56%) recalled classmates "seeing teachers in malls," "stores," "cars," and at public events. None of the 60 students interviewed recalled talking with teachers and staff off school grounds.

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Caring Middle School Staff

Ninety-six of 179 adult residents (54%) indicated that their child's school was "safe." Of 179 respondents, 88 parents and guardians (49%) indicated they "didn't know the names of all their [childrens'] teachers," while 72 (40%) said they did not "know what was being taught in school." Fifty-one of 179 parents and guardians (28%) felt they could "understand the homework" if their child needed help, while 68 (38%) admitted they were "not positive" or "certain" if homework was "being done" or "turned in." Finally, the remaining 60 parent .d guardians(34%) indicated their children "did homework in school" and "never did homework at home."

One hundred sixty four parents and guardians (92%) "disagreed" and "strongly disagreed," while three were "neutral," and two "agreed" with the statement that their "son's or daughter's teachers care about them." Eighty-three of the 179 adult respondents (46%) indicated that some teachers "cared" or "probably cared," while none of the 179 adult interviewees recalled having teachers and school staff "calling," "writing," or "saying something nice" about their children. Seventy six of the 179 guardians and parents (42%) explained that meetings with teachers first occurred when these respondents "were called by the principal or police when something went bad." These 76 respondents indicated that interactions with teachers and staff were usually "angry," "embarrassing," and "bad," with "principals and [vice-principals] protecting teachers like they couldn't do nothing wrong." These respondents also indicated that "meeting with teachers didn't happen unless the principal or somebody else was there."

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Finally, these 76 respondents indicated that conferences resulted in families and students "being blamed," "kicked out," "tossed," "given one last chance," and "being told what to do." Thirty two of 179 guardians and parents (18%) indicated they attended "parent-teacher night," while 96 of 179 (54%) indicated negative "phone calls," "notes," "letters in the mail," and "meetings with teachers in school" made them feel "embarrassed," "alone," "not as smart," "stupid," and "not wanted in their own child's school."

All 60 students described teachers "who cared and were patient" as "very good," and each recalled having at least one teacher who "cared" about them. Of this group, 42 middle school students (70%) identified elementary school teachers as "caring" while 18 students "agreed," and four "strongly agreed" (36%) with the statement that their "teachers cared about them." Students described "caring" teachers and staff as those who "sometimes" gave students allowances for "not doing homework," "sleeping" and arriving "late to class." "Caring teachers" also "talked" privately, "spent time," and did not "cut" or "embarrass" students. Finally caring teachers did not "ignore students" who may have "mouthed" or "wised-off" previously in class. Thirty-six of 60 students (60%), on the other hand, "disagreed" and "strongly disagreed" with the statement their middle school teachers "cared about them."

Middle School Staff Effective Overall

Two hundred seven of 239 community respondents (86%) "disagreed" and "strongly disagreed" with the statement "middle school staff [were] effective overall."

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Eleven respondents (4%) were "neutral," and 21 "agreed" (8%) that "middle school staff [were] effective overall." None of the participants interviewed "strongly agreed" that middle school staff were effective overall.

Of the 179 adult respondents, 85 adults (47%) "disagreed" and 76 "strongly disagreed" (42%) with the statement "middle school staff [were] effective overall." Eleven adults (6%) were "neutral," and seven (3%) agreed that "middle school staff [were] effective." Forty-six of 60 students (76%) "disagreed," and "strongly disagreed," and 14 "agreed" (23%) that "middle school staff [were] effective overall."

Community residents "disagreed" and "strongly disagreed" because they believed the schools did not "know," "care," "support," and "have any interest" in their communities. These adult respondents also explained that middle school staff "did not welcome," "give help," and "help neighborhood kids find a good future." These interviewees said that middle school teachers and staff "were afraid," "were ignorant," and "[did not] really know what people [parents and residents] and kids really needed." Fifty seven of the 67 guardians and parents interviewed (85%) stated that "no one ever asked about what [their children] like to do," and to their knowledge, "the schools never talked about poor kids," and "doing for poor kids and their families." These participants also indicated that teachers and staff "must have known when people [students and families] needed help," while none of the parents and guardians admitted contacting school personnel to discuss family need. Seven of 67 guardians (10%) "knew somebody" or "heard about somebody" receiving "food," "canned goods," "winter

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overcoats," and "Christmas presents from the school."

Fifty eight of the 60 middle students interviewed (96%) admitted that middle school teachers and staff "never asked them" about their homes and neighborhoods, and 56 students (93%) said they "didn't think" these personnel talked to other students "in the neighborhood about their homes and neighborhood things unless it was on TV or in the newspaper or something." In contrast, 60 of 60 students could recall teachers "ribbing," "teasing," and "talking" with students "they were close to" about "having to cut grass" and "their parents buying a new car." These 60 students also said they were "not asked" and "never told teachers what they do at home," while 46 students (76%) admitted they wrote "in journals," "paragraphs," and "composition" about their "interests," and "what [they] liked to do outside of school." When asked if they ever volunteered to share descriptions of their home lives with teachers and other students, 44 of 60 students (73%) said "no." None of the 60 students interviewed recalled being asked or selected to "talk about home in front of the class" by teachers. Finally, six of the 60 students (10%) interviewed described when their school "collected cans" and "gave stuff to poor families at Christmas."

Existing School-Community Collaborative Structures

Analyzing existing collaborative school structures involved interviews and observations with students, guardians, and school personnel. Various school committee meetings were attended and committee minutes and other school documents were analyzed to understand the extent to which students and guardians

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from the communities studied were participating, involved and collaborating with the eight middle schools included in this research. In short, students and guardians were asked to describe additional school activities they participated in that also involved other neighborhood students and school staff. School personnel including principals, teachers and staff were asked to identify and nominate committees, functions, and school activities to observe and study that involved students, guardians, and school personnel in meeting at least two times a year.

School-Community Collaborative Structures and Activities

Students, Guardians and Parents:

Interviews with students, parents and guardians indicated that they defined their involvement in school as including "scheduled meetings with school personnel" like school "psychologists," "guidance counselors," "police liaison officers," principals," "vice-principals," "teachers," and "special ed. people" 100 percent of the time (see Table 6). Eleven of 60 students (18%) and 14 of 67 parents and guardians (21%) also described their involvement and attendance to school sporting events including "basketball" and "football" games. Zero students and eight parents and guardians (12%) gave "parent-teacher conferences" as examples of school-community involvement, and neither the students nor their guardians could recall being invited by school personnel to participate in various program committees and in parent-teacher associations/organizations. Additionally, none of the students and guardians interviewed could identify "what happened," "what program committees do," and "what program committees are for."

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Finally, none of the 127 students and guardians interviewed could explain "when" the parent-teacher association/organization met, and "how it [the parent-teacher association] worked."

Table 6. Respondents' Definitions of School-Community Involvement Including Percentages.

Respondent	Numbers of Responses	Nature of School-Community Involvement					
		A	B	C	D	E	F
Students	60	60 (100%)	11 (18%)	0	N/A*	0	N/A*
Parents/ Guardians	67	67 (100%)	14 (21%)	8 (12%)	0	0	0
Principals	8	8 (100%)	8 (100%)	8 (100%)	5 (88%)	8 (100%)	8 (100%)
Assistant Principals	4	3 (75%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	2 (50%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)
Teachers	29	17 (59%)	8 (28%)	19 (66%)	6 (21%)	14 (48%)	18 (62%)
Staff	8	2 (25%)	5 (83%)	8 (100%)	1 (17%)	1 (17%)	8 (100%)

* Not Applicable.

Table 6. Key:
A. Scheduled visits with school personnel
B. School Events
C. Parent-Teacher Conference(s)
D. Attendance/Membership in Board of Education
E. School Planning and Instructional Program Committees
F. Attendance/ Membership in Parent-Teacher Association/Organization

Administrators, Teachers, and Staff

Interviews with administrators, teachers, and middle school staff indicated that these 49 respondents defined involvement in "additional school activities" as including "extra curricular" and "auxiliary opportunities" that are "available to all students and parents at no extra cost." In addition to the programs offered by students and guardians, programs and activities cited by school personnel included "the school board

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of education," "school planning" and "instructional program committees," "homework and information hot lines, "regular classroom activities," "before school and after school tutoring for students who take advantage of it," "yearbooks," "newspapers," "science fairs," and "art and graduation assemblies."

Specific Programs and Activities for the Poor:

When asked if specific programs and activities existed for poor students and their families, various administrators, teachers, and staff identified "Chapter I," "free breakfast and lunch," "special education," and "special teachers," and "special services" like school nurses, psychologists, case workers, liaison officers," and "alternative school settings" (see Table 7). "Alternative school settings" described "in-school suspension," "alternative programs," and "alternative schools" for students that needed "time-out" and that "could not fit in the regular mainstream classroom." Handbooks provided by each of the eight school districts similarly described "alternative school settings" as "[settings] for the non-traditional student;" for the "special needs student;" and alternative settings "for the student unable to successfully adjust."

Table 7. Specific Programs and Activities for the Poor Identified by Middle School Personnel (N = 49).

Participant	Number of Responses	Programs and Activities Identified				
		Chapter I	Breakfast and Lunch	Special Education	School Personnel	Alternative Schools
Principals	8	8	8	1	8	0
Assistant Principals	4	4	4	3	3	1
Teachers	29	21	29	18	21	14
Staff	8	4	8	8	6	5

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Practitioners' Perceptions of Specific Programs and Activities for the Poor:

When asked to discuss their support and "nonsupport," 32 of 49 practitioners (65%) "disagreed" and "strongly disagreed" with "programs just for the poor," and 15 middle school personnel (31%) "agreed" with schools providing additional programs and activities (see Table 8). Zero administrators, teachers, and staff "strongly agreed," and two teachers were "neutral" on having programs and activities for the poor in their schools.

Table 8. Middle School Perceptions of Need for Specific Programs for Poor.

Participant	Number of Responses	Respondents' Perceptions				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Principals	8	0	3	0	2	3
Assistant Principals	4	0	2	0	1	1
Teachers	29	2	4	2	9	12
Staff	8		4		0	4
Total(s)	49	2	13	2	12	20

Of the 32 practitioners that "disagreed" and "strongly disagreed" with specific programs and activities, all 32 respondents believed that existing programs and activities already housed in the individual middle schools "accounted for poor students and their families needs in some ways." Twenty-two of these 32 practitioners(69%) indicated that specific programs and activities would "reduce," "cut," "take away," and "limit" existing resources for "the majority of students," and five (16%) believed they would "hurt," "separate," "single out," and "stigmatize" students "just because they didn't

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have things." Four practitioners (8%) believed that "programs like [these] shouldn't be [the responsibility] of the schools," and one middle school practitioner "[did not] approve of poor programs on principle."

Of the 17 practitioners (35%) favoring specific programs and activities, all 17 felt that existing school programs and activities were "not adequate," "not enough," and "were not made" to meet the needs of poor students and their families. Twelve of these 17 middle school practitioners (71%) also said they "would support such programs" because "poor students are not a priority" in their respective schools. The remaining five respondents (29%) indicated that they were "not sure about specific programs." These five also agreed that lacking specific programs and activities, poor students and families would "probably not make it," and "[do not] have a chance."

Discussion

Physiological, Social, and Spiritual Needs

An analysis of residents' concerns and perceptions of need indicated that specific physiological, social, and spiritual needs existed, and that neither the principals nor middle school personnel were formally identifying or addressing these needs in school. Analyses of these data also indicated that student and family behaviors were affected by depressed surroundings and especially concerns about safety, personal finance, and property crime. A loss of faith for their future and in the willingness of others to care also emerged. These perceptions were due in part to poverty, and in part to the unwillingness of school personnel to advance membership for poor families

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and youth by including concepts and terms familiar to poor residents in schooling.

An analysis of the data also revealed that family and student psychology were adversely affected by structures and cultures that championed middle and upper class ideologies over knowledge and beliefs held by the poor. Principals and middle school personnel in other words, forwarded concepts and behaviors not found in impoverished communities and homes while leaving the experiences of the poor out. Additionally, practitioners required poor students and families to reject familiar home understandings in deference to life experiences that were less common, foreign, and presumably better than those in the homes and communities of the poor. In this way, administrators, teachers and staff acted as "safekeepers of the middle class faith," creating and establishing criterion for opportunity, mobility, and social class membership.

Restless, Antagonistic, and Prideful Youth

Analyses of perceptions and various documents revealed that youth identity was associated, manufactured, and cultivated on the basis of property acquisition and the formation of nurturing peer and social relationships. The number, size, and quality of possessions and peers collected were all important for personal and social affirmation. Additionally, the conditions of poverty, "not having things," and possible dependance upon others for help were found to be "embarrassing," dehumanizing, and potentially debilitating for families and youth. In sum, the accumulation and ownership of material goods seemed useful for healing and affirming the identities of poor middle school students. Additionally, the acquiring of personal property seemed important for creating

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individual and group pride. Finally, "the having" or possessing of goods and property seemed necessary for establishing and confirming normalcy in school, and for imaging current and future success for students and school personnel who similarly associated materials possessions and wealth with current and future success.

A Separate Agenda

Analyses of the contexts surrounding and within the middle schools indicated that these institutions operated as independent powers. Public schools were framed as the "only choice available" by poor residents and youth. Analyses also indicated participants felt powerless as schools could dictate terms related to membership, propriety, and organizational survival.

Additionally, school imperatives related to maintenance of social and institutional equilibrium and order dominated as poor families and students were required to conform and comply in school while disassociating themselves from their personal lifestyles at home. These participants viewed interactions with practitioners, instruction, and various school recognition efforts with suspicion and as "empty gifts," awarded to the extent that families and students denied their identities and lifestyles to live and become "what the school thought they should."

Implications for Reform

An assumption within this study is that educational scholars, practitioners, researchers, and policy makers want to proactively address the needs of poor students, families, and communities beyond academics. An analyses of the data herein indicate

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that this belief may not be entirely accurate as middle school personnel made little or no effort to ensure a diverse representation on different school committees, school boards and in parent-teacher associations. Interviews with practitioners serving on school-community programs and activities revealed instead that a majority disagreed with the creation of specific programs for the poor, citing fixed resources, the stigmatizing of students, and the prior existence of programs as rationales for disapproval. Finally, an analysis of the nature of school-community relations indicates that interactions involving the poor valued containment, were highly regulatory, and that the inclusion of poor students and families was largely contingent upon the skill and ability of the principal and school personnel to control behavior and involvement, and upon the capacity for poor residents to reinvent themselves and fit in.

Based on these findings, various implications and recommendations emerge for school reform. First, analyses suggest that considerable mystery and ignorance about the context of impoverished communities exists in schools. Poor students and families are seen as abstractions. This means that misinformation and misgivings about poor residents also exists severely curtailing opportunities for schooling, expression, and the development of personal efficacy for residents. Findings also suggest that school climates that affirm one lifestyle in deference to another simultaneously yield promise and despair while crippling inclusion and mobility for poor students and their families.

With this, educational scholars, practitioners, researchers, and policy makers must redefine their concepts of effectiveness and school success. This requires that

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individuals start with community based research, knowledge and perceptions to understand students and residents and how they may best be served in schools. Next, educational structures, cultures, and practitioners' beliefs need attention so that autonomy, enhanced expectations, and entrepreneurial behaviors emerge, and so that programs, student-teacher ratios, sufficient time, and staff development are created and positively affected.

These ideas are not new and may never approach fruition if reform efforts continue to focus exclusively on schools. Thus, collecting adequate resources also means organizational diversification, and the inclusion of various disciplines and agencies including those from the public and private sectors. The African proverb that "It takes a whole village to raise a child" is not being disputed in this research. Instead, analyses indicate that poor communities indeed already raise and affect poor residents. Analyses also suggest that if personal efficacy and freedom from poverty are to be attained for individuals and families, that school reform and community revitalization must occur concomitantly.

Specific implications for administrator and teacher preparation programs are similarly founded on cross-disciplinary, community based approaches to understanding the rules of the urban school context. Preparation programs must start with the recognition that urban communities possess enormous diversity and in short, greater opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration and vital partnerships. In this spirit, a review of current research presenting methodologies from the social sciences may be

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possible. Disciplines may come from education, urban studies, social work, public administration, and research on health and welfare. Administrators and teachers must also hold sophisticated understandings about public finance and how to do more for peoples who have less money. These recommendations are not given to dilute or weaken understandings and specific theory from particular areas of research. Instead, they are offered for those who hope to broaden knowledge and attend to access. Additionally, these recommendations are provided for those who see great promise and opportunity in urban peoples and the urban school context.

To ensure effective school reform, educational scholars, practitioners, researchers, and policy makers must also avoid negative thinking and becoming trapped in mediocrity and a "psychology of failure" (Cohen, et. al. 1995, p.19). When research programs and guidelines are inadequate to meet the physiological, social, and spiritual needs introduced by the poor, it remains unacceptable to say they "at least have Chapter I" and "free breakfast and lunch." These responses suggest that educators are lowering expectations and redefining success as the absence of failure. Similarly, these lowered expectations lead to discouragement as challenges become obstacles and reasons for nonperformance and reduced experimentation emerge. Finally, those concerned with aiding the poor must avoid becoming bogged down in structural determinism or standard operating procedures. Taking comfort in known -- one size fits all -- activities is not effective for forwarding change and opportunity. This approach encourages educators to forget that people count. It also is designed to

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ensure rapid and efficient school operations, and to reward and penalize persons according to their social class membership. Hence, building advocacy through skilled communication and empathy are also important for building trust and preserving human dignity.

Summary

Figures taken from various sources offer rationales for understanding how schools serve the public and especially the poor. First, polls indicate that 60% of those persons surveyed rate the nation's public schools in general, as average or below average (PDK) overall. These findings reveal that lack of discipline and a lack of financial support are viewed as the major problems facing schools implying that physiological concerns are not particular to the nation's poor.

Second, analyses of polls indicate that people rate the schools in their communities much higher than they rate the nation's schools, and that the closer people get, the higher the school ratings. This forwards arguments for full inclusion suggesting that as people's knowledge and involvement in schools is increased, so too is their level of satisfaction with daily school operations, policy, and instructional pedagogy.

Third, an analysis of 1995 census data indicates that approximately 15,727,000 children under 18 (1995, US Dept. Of Commerce) were at or below poverty levels during 1994. This figure reflects a steady increase in the numbers of poor youth from 1990 to the present, and a greater than 9% increase in the number of poor children

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from 1993 to 1994. Additionally, this figure indicates that greater than 20% of the Nation's children are also poor, further suggesting that recognizing how schools serve poor residents is critical for understanding the increasingly negative effect of poverty on each person's quality of life.

Finally, studying the effect of schools on the poor may lead to understandings that, in part, explain the nation's dissatisfaction with public education. In short, its seems that as the numbers of poor youth continue to increase in the United States, so too will economic interdependence, and depressed public expectations about the potential of education to erase poverty and secure abundance for everyone. Thus, attending to how public schools serve the poor may also be important for garnering confidence, support, for building stronger schools, and for enhancing opportunity for everyone.

In close, this study represents an initial step toward understanding how public schools serve the poor. Continued research may yield additional understandings on how interagency collaboration may be facilitated to further knowledge, training, praxis, and opportunity. This is important as public education alone has not proven very good at producing social mobility and satisfactory levels of material wealth for the poor. Also, as a mixed public-private system may be required, these partnerships may significantly alter understandings and the actual contexts in and surrounding urban schools. Finally, these heightened multi disciplinary community based public and private partnerships may alter how principal and teacher training programs are structured, and how school

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effectiveness is conceptualized and defined.

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